

## Program Funds Big Dreams for Students

by Greg Bolt of The Register-Guard in Eugene, Ore. (reprinted with permission)

**Grant: The UO launches a challenging education program aimed at preparing American Indian students as teachers**

Misty Mocekis went all the way through school in Eugene without ever having a teacher she could really identify with.

It's not that she didn't have good teachers, it's just that none shared her American Indian heritage. But now Mocekis is helping change that.

She's one of the first graduate students in a new teacher training program at the University of Oregon aimed at ensuring Native American

teachers aren't so few and far between. Working with a consortium of nine Pacific Northwest tribes, the UO's College of Education recently received a \$1 million federal grant to launch the innovative program, believed to be the only one like it in the country.

"I went all through school without a Native teacher," said Mocekis, who is of Coquille heritage. "I just think that can bring so much to a classroom. For Native students, it can bring a positive

role model and possibly give them an incentive to become a teacher themselves or further their education, and for non-Natives it can give them a whole different perspective."

It's known as the Sapsik'walá program, and it's designed to help overcome some of the social and financial obstacles faced by what is typically the smallest ethnic group in college classrooms, whether students or faculty.

Sapsik'walá (pronounced sap-seek-wash-la) is a Sahaptian word meaning "teacher."

The grant will be used to pay tuition and educational expenses for about 20 American Indian students, along with a stipend to help with living expenses and a child care credit. The idea is to bring the students in as a group so they don't feel so isolated on a campus with few Indian students and make it financially possible to bring family when they come to Eugene.

"The budget is designed specifically to accommodate the lifestyle of Native people," said Az Carmen, who coordinates Native American recruitment and retention for the UO admissions office and is a member of the Chickasaw tribe. "Very frequently, when we come to school we bring our families with us."

And the nature of the teacher training program can make that difficult. The demanding mix of graduate-level classes and student teaching often leaves little time for a job to help pay expenses – Mocekis had to quit hers to have time for school – and can strain family connections.

"When you bring in a group of students to a campus like this that is primarily white, you want to give them a little more support so you can graduate all of your students," said Pat Rounds, assistant coordinator of the middle/secondary teacher education program in the UO College of Education.

Twenty students may seem like a small number for a \$1 million grant, but the program's aim is to offer as much support as possible to get more Indian teachers into schools in Oregon and

elsewhere. And with only about 100 Indian teachers licensed in Oregon, 20 is enough to make a difference with its first class. "In one fell swoop, that will increase the number of Native teachers by 20 percent," Rounds said. "We need teachers who represent diversity and can be good role models."

The idea seems to resonate with the American Indian community.

Carmen said she's been getting five calls a day for two weeks from people interested in the program, even though news of it has only filtered out through Internet word-of-mouth.

And getting into the program isn't easy. It's for students who already have their bachelor's degree and want to enter the intensive, master's-level program that leads to a teaching certificate. Applicants will have to meet minimum grade-point requirements, do well on three separate admissions tests, and also show financial need.

Supporters plan to seek renewal of the grant and track down other sources of money in hopes of keeping Sapsik'walá going. In time, they see the UO as assuming a lead role in preparing American Indian teachers.

With an estimated 12,000 American Indian students in Oregon's K-12 schools, Mocekis isn't the only one who will grow up without ever having an American Indian teacher. Carmen had the same experience, but she said it isn't only Native students who benefit from teacher diversity.

"Any person of color changes the dynamic when they teach in a majority school," she said. "They will bring awareness to their classes of a culture that is different from what others bring to it."

Mocekis, who has a bachelor's in educational studies, already has begun her teacher training program and will step into the Sapsik'walá program winter term. She hasn't decided where she wants to teach once she completes the program, but hopes she can inspire kids wherever she goes.

"I'm open to anything," she said. "I would love to be that positive role model for kids."

## Residents Win TV Sets

The Siletz Tribal Housing Residents Organization meeting in December had three Christmas gift winners who received their own TVs.

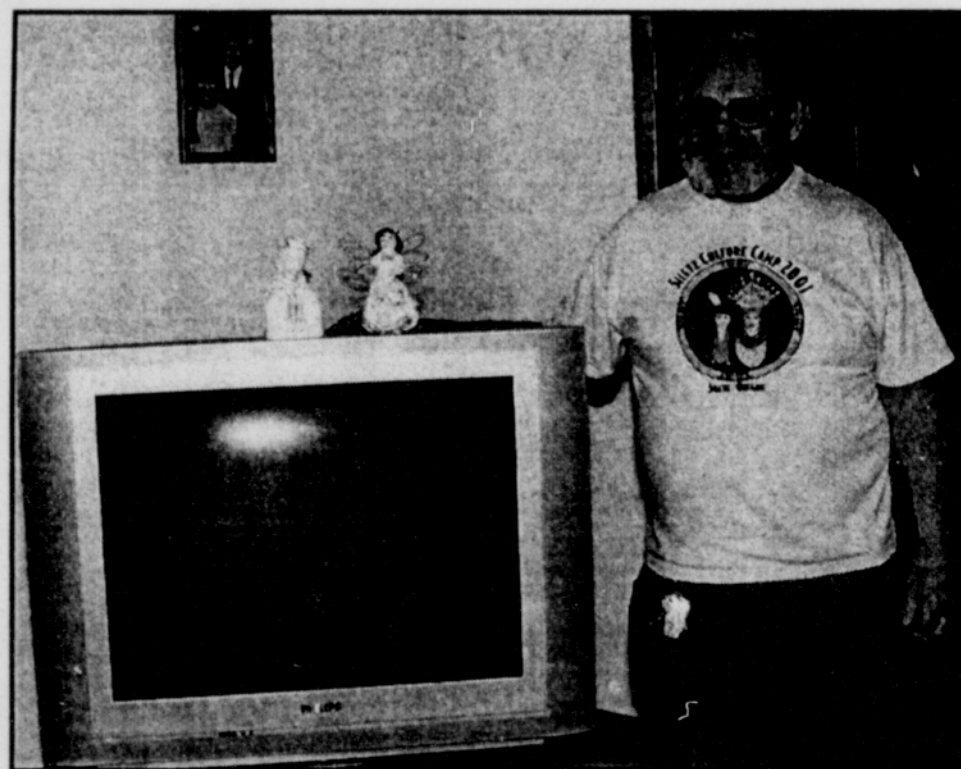
TV winners were Wylie Eddings (32"), Maria Westervelt (27"), and Tony Blomstom (19"). Two DVD players also were given away.

The conference room at the Siletz Indian Housing Department (SIHD) was filled with expectant and hopeful winners, including lots and lots of children, a few babies, and many eager residents.

All of the children received gifts. Several movie tickets were given away and of course, the TV sets were given to three lucky residents.



Maria Westervelt displays her new 27" TV set.



Wylie Eddings was the big winner of the 32" TV set.